



The Y-Press project -- power of the question -- is intended to share widely the question-writing process and impart the importance of learning how to write solid questions. In a cursory Internet search of current teaching materials with the word "question" in the title, 399 hits emerged, none of which addressed teaching the art of writing questions. Given the lack of accessible materials, this project will provide practical teaching materials and ideas for classroom teachers.

## Project concept: The power of the question

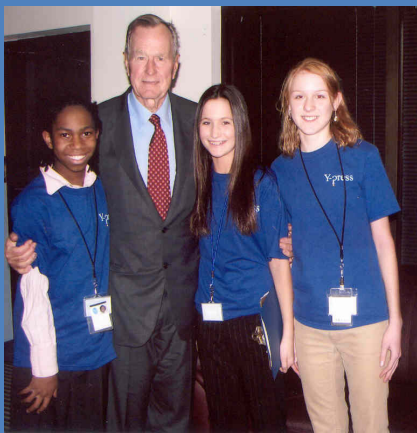
Alarming studies have shown Americans lacking in critical thinking skills, often linked to their inability to ask poignant questions. For over 18 years, Y-Press has trained hundreds of kids to produce stories from a youth perspective for the mainstream media. And over those decades, training for these young journalists has always begun the same way -- learning the basics of question writing and honing that skill.

Using questions, Y-Press journalists have interviewed hundreds of children, members of Congress, gubernatorial candidates and foreign leaders. Oftentimes during the process, we have witnessed a tangible benefit to the interviewer -- that of shifting their learning from passive to active, while triggering intellectual curiosity. At the same time, we have witnessed a common void in most Y-Press journalists' school experience -- students are not taught question writing in the classroom.

The Y-Press project -- power of the question -- is intended to share widely the question-writing process and impart the importance of learning how to write solid questions. In a cursory Internet search of current teaching materials with the word "question" in the title, 399 hits emerged, none of which addressed teaching the art of writing questions. Given the lack of accessible materials, this project will provide practical teaching materials and ideas for classroom teachers.

The Foundation for Critical Thinking agrees that thinking is not driven by answers but by questions. Questions define tasks, express problems and delineate issues. Answers on the other hand, often signal a full stop in thought. Only when an answer generates a further question does thought continue.

- *Questions drive our thought underneath the surface of things force us to deal with complexity. Questions of purpose force us to define our task.*
- *Questions of information force us to look at our sources of information as well as at the quality of our information.*
- *Questions of interpretation force us to examine how we are organizing or giving meaning to information.*
- *Questions of assumption force us to examine what we are taking for granted.*
- *Questions of implication force us to follow where our thinking is going.*



The underpinnings of democracy allow healthy dialogue, often initiated with a thought-provoking question. Through this project, Y-Press plans to introduce these skills to students by developing materials to teach the importance of good questions and the art involved in formulating them.

- *Questions of point of view force us to examine our point of view and to consider other relevant points of view.*
- *Questions of relevance force us to discriminate what does and what does not bear on a question. Questions of accuracy force us to evaluate and test for truth and correctness.*
- *Questions of consistency force us to examine our thinking for contradictions.*
- *Questions of logic force us to consider how we are putting the whole of our thought together, to make sure that it all adds up and makes sense within a reasonable system of some kind.*

- From *The Role of Socratic Questioning in Thinking, Teaching, & Learning*

<http://www.criticalthinking.org/articles/the-role-socratic-questioning--ttl.cfm>

## The project

The underpinnings of democracy allow healthy dialogue, often initiated with a thought-provoking question. Through this project, Y-Press plans to introduce these skills to students by developing materials to teach the importance of good questions and the art involved in formulating them.

In preliminary conversations with Y-Press members, teachers and principals, it is clear that there is an interest to fill this void. A series of lessons will help examine and teach powerful inquiry and the importance of being able to write questions in order to gather critical information. Working with Indiana University/Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI) Solution Center and staff from The School of Education and School of Informatics, Y-Press journalists will partner to create several products.

The six-month project will include:

- Five or six motivational videos that feature well-known professional interviewers who will share, along with Y-Press youth, the importance of good questions and approaches to the task. These are people who ask questions for a living, are someone that students can relate to and represent a diversity of media. Thirteen Y-Press youth journalists will be responsible for making contacts with the video talent – professionals like Terry Gross, Oprah Winfrey, Fareed Zakaria and Anderson Cooper, Christiane Amanpour -- who will provide real-life connections and motivation for students to learn the art of writing thought-provoking questions. (Key adult support: Freddi Jacobi, Susan Tennant)
- In a two-week summer course for 10 area teachers, each video will be enhanced with teaching strategies. The Y-Press team responsible for the video will work with educators to develop the curriculum. (Key adult



Teaching materials along with videos will be posted on Y-Press's Web site and available for classroom educators. Built into the site will be an evaluation, allowing teachers access to the teaching strategies after completion of a critical review. (Small Box/Krista Hoffman-Longtin)

The project, additionally, will help market Y-Press as an after-school activity to a wider audience and associate the Y-Press process to critical thinking.

True to Y-Press's core principles, the project will be youth-driven, with the activities designed by young people for young people. By analyzing and evaluating material used to write questions, and in turn sharing the Y-Press experience of writing questions, this project carries tremendous responsibility for delivery of knowledge. Y-Press brings the child voice to the project from both sides: as an accomplished interviewer and as a young person is continuing to develop skills.

This is not the youth-media organization's first experience with an in-depth project and teaching curriculum. Over 18 years, Y-Press journalists have produced significant products, including a calendar featuring young peoples' stories about diversity with pre- and post-questions to provoke thoughtful discussion, and a health-discussion tool. Recently, Clarian's Healthy Families requested Y-Press's radio features on teen parents to use for in-service training opportunities and orientation and pairing it with its existing teen-centered curriculum.

### Organizational history

Y-Press was established in 1990 as the Indianapolis bureau for Children's Express, the trailblazing youth journalism program that began in the 1970s.

The apogee of Children's Express's success was also the point at which youth media was ready to be taken seriously—when a 12-year-old Children's Express reporter scooped the world press at the 1976 National Democratic Convention. The event itself made news. According to the organization's founder, Robert Clampitt, *"We learned that when children are given important responsibilities, their confidence and their interest in the world around them grows rapidly. It was clear that children want a voice and that they have much to contribute."*

The success of Children's Express led to its national and international expansion, with youth news bureaus including Tokyo and the U.K., and also paved the way for youth-media expansion and diversification in the 1980s and 1990s.

Programs increasingly would focus on youth voice, teen expression, voices of under-represented groups, such as urban or foster youth, and be voices of youth in the service of social action. Few youth media groups today focus on training in the traditional journalism method.

Few youth-media programs also make regular use of mainstream media outlets. The majority of youth-media programs today depend on more specialized, targeted media sources. Even while Children's Express was in the habit of pitching stories to the media in the hopes they would be 'picked up,' the Indianapolis bureau proved maverick in securing an immediate partnership with mainstream newspaper *The Indianapolis Star*, a partnership that continues today.

After nearly 10 years as part of the Children's Express network, the Indianapolis bureau separated from its parent organization and changed its name to Y-Press in 1999. By late 2004, Y-Press had established itself as an independent, nonprofit organization. Today at Y-Press, youth produce print, radio and Web features that reach diverse audiences through its Web site, [www.ypress.org](http://www.ypress.org), *The Indianapolis Star* (circulation 341,487) and local public radio *WFYI-FM (90.1)*.

In all aspects, such as story generation and content, Y-Press is entirely independent from its media partners. Its partnership with the Gannett-owned *Star* offers ongoing, dedicated space for nonprofit youth reporting in an otherwise mainstream, commercial paper. Biweekly a half-page is reserved for Y-Press in its Sunday *Voices* section. During the "Morning Edition" timeslot, listeners can hear reports by young journalists, covering juvenile court or reporting on the Peru circus and its young performers or from the national presidential conventions.

Over the years, Y-Press youth have created stories about under-heard youth, such as a feature on local Burmese refugees who were once child soldiers; regional stories, such as radio features that culminated from a trip to Dearborn, Mich. to learn about life for Arab-American communities after 9/11; presidential conventions, such as this year's Democratic Convention in Denver and Republican Convention in St. Paul; and international stories that include interviews with youth in West Africa (2006), Hong Kong (2000) and Kuwait (1991).

The adult media often write stories about young people without a single quote from a young person, not because they don't care, but because they have limited access to youth. This is in stark contrast to Y-Press's reporters and editors, who interact with their peers daily and know what young people think and feel. Often Y-Press members ask questions that might be odd for an adult to ask. In their work at Y-Press, youth work as coaches, not competitors.